

folded their hands and are now stuck in the same position they started out in, refusing to compromise, refusing to move toward some shared consensus about what direction our budget priorities should be as a country.

The U.S. Constitution is clear, and that is that laws have to be passed by the House and the Senate and signed by the President. I am not proud of the fact that I have been a Member of the least productive Congress in the history of our country in terms of actually passing legislation that moves on to the upper Chamber, or the other body, depending on how you like to phrase it, and then on to the President for his signature.

What we have here is a group of people who are now in the majority that seems to lack the maturity to be productive participants in shaping the course of public policy in our land. So, because their budget product has been rejected by the American people, they have decided to hold hostage 75 percent of the U.S. Government domestic programs.

So we come now on the eve of a holiday season, and many of my colleagues have pleaded for sympathy for Federal workers. I really would hope that we would understand their plight, but I think it is even more a compelling case to feel sympathy for the misguided priorities of the Republican majority. This is a defining moment I believe in this Congress. This shows clearly that they do not have what it takes in terms of being able to govern the people's house, to be responsible and reasonable in their actions.

So I would ask that as we reflect upon this moment in time, that we would think clearly about the opportunities that the new year will bring; for the American public to think anew about what type of person they would like to have in the U.S. Congress; to think anew about how we can further develop a more perfect union; to think anew about our responsibilities, as so eloquently outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, in the preamble where it says to promote the general welfare, being our essential priority.

We have a lot to be thankful for in this land, and one of the things we have to be thankful for is that there is an election for Congress every 2 years, and that we will arrive at a point in which the American public will hold the trump card, and they will have an opportunity to make choices about what kind of country we really want to be and what kind of Nation we really want to move toward.

I would challenge each of us as we continue our work in this body to try to be more reasonable, to try to accommodate the differences of opinion that truly exist in terms of how to move our country forward, but always to be prepared, even in a moment in which we lack some degree of comfort, to stand firm for what we believe in, to stand up

for our principles, and for the democratic majority and for a President who has struggled to try to reason with an unreasonable majority of the Congress. I think we owe President Clinton a great degree of gratitude for his leadership for our Nation in our hour of need.

REASONS FOR THE BUDGET TURMOIL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas [Ms. JACKSON-LEE] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I think this is an important time in this country. Many of our citizens are turning toward a very spiritual time. Many having been in the midst of celebration of Hanukkah, and others who are looking toward a celebration and commemoration of the birth of Christ.

The value of this Nation is that this holiday will be celebrated differently in many homes across this country. It is the wonderfulness of America, diversity of thought and religion, but a Constitution that applauds differences and recognizes the three branches of government. I think it is important to tell the American people why we are here today, on December 20, 1995, in the midst of turmoil without a budget.

This Congress started on January 4, 1995. I was sworn in as a new freshman, running on the issues of accountability and accessibility, and yes, responsibility, values that I hold very dear and very near to my heart and to my principles, and values that I represent to my constituents at every moment in interacting with them in my district visits.

But what happened to us that time in January and February and March? We were faced with something called a contract. Oh, it is so well for a while, but let me tell you, it was a gimmick. I do not know of any American who can say to me that they engaged and entered into a contract with anyone who was elected to the U.S. Congress.

There was some flag waving on the Capitol steps, and wannabees and others who were running for Congress at that time came up and made some sort of false representations about signing some document. But I would venture to say that even constituents in those districts did not sign any dotted line.

Oh, yes, they might have found exciting some very popular political issues that were raised about tort reform and crime off the streets, bashing the liberals and other such talk. But that is what it was, it was political gimmickry. And 37 percent of the people voted, so it was not that exciting anyhow.

But we spent 100 days and more in turmoil over the so-called contract, I call it on America. In the meantime, serious health reform did not occur. Many of us came here saying that we

could reasonably reform Medicare and Medicaid, not on the backs of senior citizens and children who need immunization and preventive health care, but really sit down to the table of reason and bargaining.

But out of this 100 days came a bashing and eliminating of the environmental protection laws that most Americans, Republicans and Democrats and Independents have grown to respect, the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act, and then the bashing of Medicare and Medicaid.

We should have had bills passed in April. We should have had all the appropriation bills passed by September or October 1. But what we have now is a quagmire of confusion. Republican proposed block grants which go to States, and when the money runs out and the needs of the people rise up, as we find in the natural disasters that have faced California, Texas, and Florida, among others, that have what we call natural disasters, we would not be prepared to assist those people. Do you think that is reasonable and the American people want that?

We now come to December 20 with no budget. That is what it is, plain and simple, folks. We had a gimmick called a contract. Out of that came one bill that was passed, and we now have no budget. And we have people trying to appropriate away America's values by intimidating us, by saying they stand for what America believes in.

The President, regardless of what your party may be, has an actual constitutional right to engage in this process. He has sat down with the leaders of the House and the Senate, and I might add, if you saw the media accounts, and they sure do reflect accurately many times people's expressions and views, those that came out of the meeting said we are on track.

Today we find out about an extremist position by freshmen Republicans that say all or nothing. We want to take the \$270 billion tax cut right now and we will stand on the backs of seniors and children, Medicaid and Medicare, and we do not want to reason. Yet the President spoke to the leadership and they said we are ready to sit down. Who is leading the leadership at this point? I am a Democratic freshman, and I am not going to let some other guy take the moral high ground on people in my community, Federal employees who give services, children who have sicknesses who need Medicaid. We must come together to recognize political gimmickry goes out the door, leadership stands up, get a budget, open the doors of this Government, right now, today. Pass a clean continuing resolution to open the doors of the Government and engage in budget talks that do not ask for \$270 billion out of Medicare and Medicaid simply to give the rich a tax cut.

That is the moral high ground.

ALL OUT OF PATIENCE

□ 1700

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Colorado [Mrs. SCHROEDER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. SCHROEDER. Mr. Speaker, I must say, in my religion we are in the season of Advent, and on one of these Advent Sundays, we light a patience candle. I fear that patience candle may not even do it for me this year. I have totally lost patience with the extremism of the New Republican freshmen. They appear to have the Speaker on a very short leash. But I am here today, joining the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. JOE KENNEDY, and others, in signing a letter to both Senator DOLE and to our Speaker asking for a Christmas trust in this budget war. Can we please have a Christmas trust for the 3.3 million veterans who went wherever they were sent, whether it was whatever holiday, whatever family situation, they went where they were sent. And I do not think they are going to appreciate figuring out tomorrow morning that if we have not done this Christmas trust for at least those 3.3 million, they are not going to get their checks on time on December 29. That is outrageous. That is why I have no patience.

Everybody knows today is the busiest mail day. People are using the mails to get through their holiday packages. So these checks have got to be in the mail tomorrow if they are going to be timely. And you cannot write checks if you do not have anybody there to be there and put them in.

Now, let me say, in hot wars we have insisted on trusts over Christmas. Why in the world in this budget war can we not get the Republican leadership down here and at least get our veterans out of the crossfire in this stupid little budget tantrum that some of the new Members are having?

I guess I just do not understand who is leading whom. But I think we really look pathetic. Here it is, 5 o'clock in the afternoon, we have not really done anything since 2 o'clock except yap, yap, yap, yap. Yesterday they named post offices. We have not done anything of substance. We discussed some budget that the President had like 9 months ago that was like a dead dog. Nobody has talked about it since, he has moved way beyond. He has agreed to the 7-year balancing of the budget.

I must say, here is a group of people who cannot even get this year's budget done. Hey, we are three Mondays into the fiscal year, and they cannot get this budget done. Seventy-five percent of the domestic spending has not been done, 25 percent of the way through this year. And what are they arguing about? They are arguing about projections 7 years out. Imagine, any American refusing to pay their bills this year because they have not put their budget together because they do not like the budget projections 7 years out? It will not work, America. It will not work.

And yet somehow people here are caving and allowing it to work on the other side of the aisle.

They have no credibility. If we cannot get this year's budget together, how do we ever anticipate getting to the next 6 years? So I really hope that very soon we can get through to the Republican leadership, that they answer the letter so many of us signed, that we see a Christmas truce, and we at least get our veterans out of the crossfire.

Mr. VOLKMER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. SCHROEDER. I yield to the gentleman from Missouri.

Mr. VOLKMER. Mr. Speaker, I would say to the gentlewoman that it is my information that within a short period of time, supposedly, the Committee on Rules is supposed to meet and bring forward a continuing resolution just for those people, that they can go to work in order to get those checks out for the veterans.

That is great, but that bothers me.

Mrs. SCHROEDER. I agree. The gentleman is absolutely right. We still have students. We have 60,000 students who have theirs to be processed. We can list all those others.

Mr. VOLKMER. Homeowners, trying to get loans from HUD, and everything else. All that will not be done.

What it does is, it tells me that they want to be very political. The majority of the Republicans are very political. They do not want the veterans mad at them, but they do not care about the rest of the people and the Federal workers and everything.

Mrs. SCHROEDER. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I do not know about the gentleman's veterans, but the veterans in my area did not come to town on a turnip truck. They realized that had a lot of us not signed that letter to them, and pointed out that these veterans were being held hostage and we should at least have a Christmas truce, they would not be going to the Committee on Rules right now. My veterans have figured that out. They are not dumb.

Mr. VOLKMER. If the gentlewoman would further yield, why do we not have a Christmas truce for all the Federal Government?

Mrs. SCHROEDER. I certainly agree. And I think we should have a Christmas truce for students. They did not cause this. They are totally innocent. They could not even vote in these last elections, and we could go on and on. But especially veterans.

The fact they were going to roll right over them, until a lot of us made some noise, is absolutely unbelievable. As I say, I think all of our patience has been tried. Let us hope they hurry up and get this down here, and I thank the gentleman for his comments.

Mr. VOLKMER. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the gentlewoman for her leadership in this effort.

LET US NOT MAKE THE POOR THE SCAPEGOATS IN BALANCING THE BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. POSHARD] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POSHARD. Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to come to the floor in this special order here. And let me say before I begin any of my remarks that I would consider myself to be a fairly moderate to conservative member of my caucus, as a Democrat.

Mr. Speaker, I have been reading the welfare reform conference report this afternoon, and I wanted to just make a few remarks on it, because I have some concerns about it, frankly, and I wanted to express those concerns to the body.

I favor welfare reform. I know that we have to do certain things to make sure that people exercise their self-responsibility in our society and that Government cannot be the keeper of everyone. I was reading this afternoon, however, and I could not help but think of a time when I was in the State Senate back in Illinois, several years ago, and we were going through a proposal then that I believe the Governor had initiated to cut back on some of the benefits to some of the neediest in our State.

I remember there was a little lady, a nun in the church, who brought a bus load of folks down to Springfield. And they came into our committee room, and we were considering, I believe at that time perhaps the override of this initiative that was going to cut back funds for these folks. These were all folks that lived in a rundown part of Chicago. They were ragtag. They did not have good clothes. They did not seem to be very clean. Some of them were pretty smelly.

They came into our room, and the little nun who ran the program had some of them come up and testify before our committee about how important it was just to have the extra \$10 or \$12 or \$15 a month to help them survive.

We were all sitting there listening to this, and I think pretty moved by some of the stories that these folks who lived on skid row were telling us. And I remember very specifically there was this one little guy that came up to the testimonial table and began to speak to our committee. He told us about how difficult it was to get through the winter and how he really did not have a place to stay, and he said those few extra bucks that we were taking away from them meant a lot to him. He said, "I like to get a pack of cigarettes every now and then."

The minute he said that, all the air just went out of the committee room. We were all just kind of sitting there waiting on somebody to validate every prejudice we had in our heart against poor people, and he did it for us. He said the wrong thing. I could just feel the tension begin to rise again in the